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In defence of care homes: a call to arms

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In Defence of Care Homes: A Call to Arms

In the digital age it is easy to be critical. With ever-present hyperbolic media reports on the perceived inadequacies of care homes, it is becoming more difficult for care home nurses to stand up and be proud of their profession. Indeed, this critical attitude pervades the very fibre of much of our nursing profession in general. The role of the care home nurse is too often seen as inferior when compared with colleagues who practise within acute care settings. These feelings are reinforced by a lack of postgraduate nursing programmes tailored for care home nurses, a lack of clinical academic journals that are focused on the care home setting and, indeed, the number of prestigious regional and national nursing awards that are awarded to people from within the sector. This all seems puzzling when it is estimated that more than 400 000 people in the UK receive care across more than 15 000 care homes in the UK.

For the longest time I blamed the marginalisation of the care home nurse on a variety of extrinsic factors. This blame, of course, perpetuates that erroneous mentality of 'us' (the care home nurse) and 'them' (everyone else). Who is to blame for the marginalisation of the care home nurse—the media, the universities, the NHS or the care home providers themselves? Simply put, it does not matter. Collectively nurses in the UK face the same challenges. We have patients with increasingly complex needs accessing our service, we also have a national shortage of nurses, and our politicians are continually failing us through inadequate provision of public nursing wage and low resident fees to care home providers. Nursing commentators have long written about the current peril our profession faces and perhaps now is not the time for a gloomy reminder.

Instead, I think we should channel this energy and use it to learn from one another and shout about good nursing practice, whatever the setting. From the perspective of the care home nurse, we need to shout about the wonderful things we are doing each and every day for our residents. In unison we must work together to expel the myths that have lingered in our society for far too long. We must do more to illuminate the multi-faceted role of the care home nurse. As care home nurses, we lead complex care services for our residents, we help liaise with general practitioners to ensure medications are therapeutic for our residents, we update risk assessments and change the course of our residents' care when it is required, we lead teams of care assistants in providing person-centred care, we support our residents to engage with their local community and we help our residents to make impossible decisions about their future death. We are the reinforced bridge between that resident and their family, their friends and their extended multidisciplinary team.